The Safety Net as Social Network

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The Social Safety Net in an Era of Welfare Reform

- After welfare reform, much has been learned about the impacts of time-limits and work-requirements on the economic and social well-being of welfare recipients.
- In contrast, relatively little attention has been given to observable changes in the organization of social service delivery to the poor as a result of welfare reform.
- What is meant by the social safety net as constructed by local social service providers and anti-poverty actors? And, who are they?

Traditional Safety Net Literature

1. Public Spending Safety Net

▫ Collective public financial commitment to the poor and disadvantaged, and the degree to which these social problems are or are not addressed (Blank 1997).

2. Eligibility Safety Net

▫ The rules and procedures that establish eligibility whereby access to particular government benefits and programs is established to determine who gets what, for how long, and under what conditions (Mead 1986) .

3. Contracting-out Safety Net

▫ The provision of social services to aid the poor is best understood as a contracting regime, or a series of relationships between principals and agents, between government and private organizations that deliver anti-poverty services (Smith and Lipsky, 1993).

Traditional Safety Net Literature

Early ideas were held together by an understanding of the social safety net as an agglomeration of programs and organizations (mostly public) designed to help the poor (Wilensky and Lebeaux 1958).

▫ Residual: Some viewed this agglomeration as a residual whereby it would come into play only when the normal parts of the social structure, such as the family or the market, break down.

▫ Institutional arrangement: Others viewed this agglomeration of programs and organizations as a manifestation of large-scale social change, rooted in industrialization and mass-urbanization, where the safety net was designed to address human needs which become a legitimate claim on the entire society.

Safety Net Literature-Limitations

- Residual perspective can't address the growing dependence on market-based policy (e.g., monetary and fiscal policy) to help the poor (Howard 1997).

- Difficult to accept definitions which assume this agglomeration as a system or organized action due to new federalism (Gronbjerg, 1993; Smith and Lipsky, 1993).

- Missing important actual anti-poverty actors when relying solely on conceptions of the public spending, eligibility criteria or contracting regimes as social safety net (Hasenfeld 1992).

Social Safety Net as a
Web of Social Relations

Network Approach

- Web of social relations
  - The social service provision is a system of relationships among social actors who are engaged in activities designed to help low-income segments of the population.

- Elements of Social Service Interorganizational Networks
  - This system is bounded by a socially constructed boundary. It includes a set of participating actors (nodes) and a set of relationships (ties).

Network Approach

- Interdependency
  - Interdependency is calculated by quantifying frequency of actual interaction among actors, conditional on all potential interactions. This captures the implementation among social service agencies.
  - For instance, actors depended on by others are more central than those who are not. Centrality of actors is defined by social action, not by law or policy.

Network Approach

- No defined authority structure, but self-governance
    - It is not property and cannot be privatized. Nor can it be collectivized by legitimate democratic political power. It is held together by an ethic found among those individuals in the helping fields. Therefore, the accountability is built through self-governance and reputation.

What's New?

- Network approach relaxes the previous assumption that the roles of actors in the social service provision are defined by law or designed by policy.
- Traditional approaches cannot capture an operational field in constant flux because policy and law are carried by a set of actors who might have different goals and operational methods, yet depend on each other's resources or knowledge.
- This network paradigm allows for a more dynamic view by capturing interactions among social service actors as they naturally unfold.

What's New?

- The network approach applies network analysis and graph analysis to illustrate the characteristics of the interorganizational network.
- Network analysis quantifies the interaction among the actors in the social service provision and reveals a set of actors who occupy core positions, not because of policy or laws, but because of their prestige and unique relationship patterns embedded in the network.
- Graph analysis allows us to visualize the interactions and the consequent network structures.
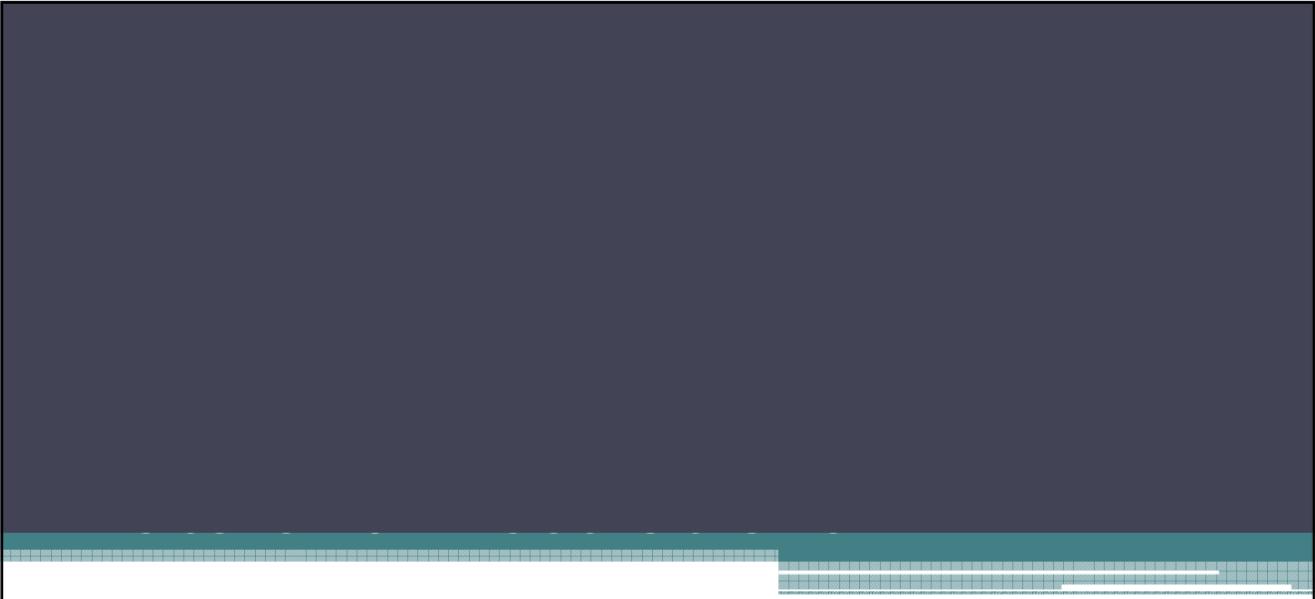
Studies from Greene and Lake County
in Indiana

Data Sources

- The Indiana Community Social Service Study.
- 295 face-to-face interviews with directors of social service agencies serving current and former welfare recipients in 7 Indiana counties.
- Data collection period: February-August 1999.
- Modified (soft) quota snowball sampling technique.
- 86 percent response rate.
- For this preliminary analysis, only data from Lake and Greene Counties are shown.

Networks Characteristics

Characteristics	Greene	Lake
Total welfare service agencies	56	59
Governmental agency	12	11
Nonprofit (non-religious)	22	36
Faith-based organization	15	9
Private agency	7	3
TANF participation following the implementation of welfare reform (1995-2000)	The rate of decline has been greatest in the state	The highest rate of welfare receipt in the state
County characteristics	Rural ; Less poverty; Ethnic Homogeneity	Urban; More poverty; Ethnic Heterogeneity

Data Sources

Questionnaire
- Part I: Closed-ended questions

  ▫ Basic descriptive characteristics of the organization, including financing, staffing patterns, and service activities.
- Part II: Open-ended questions

  ▫ Tapping respondents' perceptions of welfare reform.
- Part III: Network questions

  ▫ Organization's network and name generator.

    · "Please mention the names of ten other social service providers that your organization works with. I am going to ask you a few questions about these organizations and their interactions with each other."

Research Method

Network Analysis
- The goal of the analysis is to assemble all identified relationships among sampled safety net actors.
- Use UCINET 6 (Borgatti, Everett, and Freeman 1999) to conduct the network analysis.
- Define the centrality, density, and multiplexity (include the attributes and strength of ties) of organizations and their relationships by methods developed by Walker, Wasserman, and Wellman (1994).
- Two levels of analysis: individual roles and the entire network properties.

Complexity of Social Safety Net as Social Network

Complete Network by Centrality
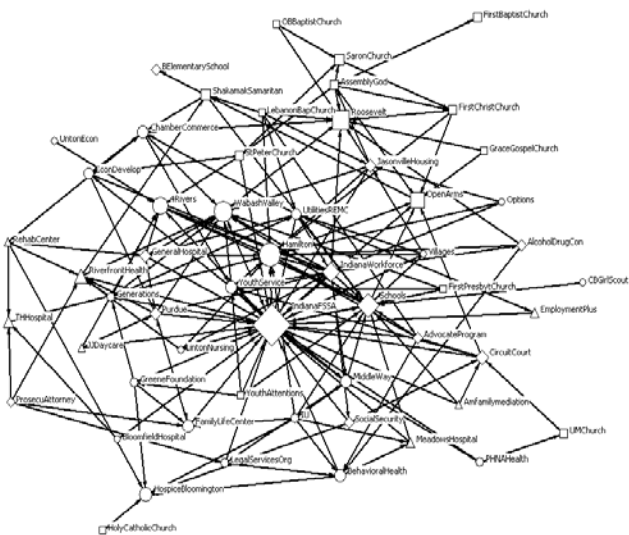
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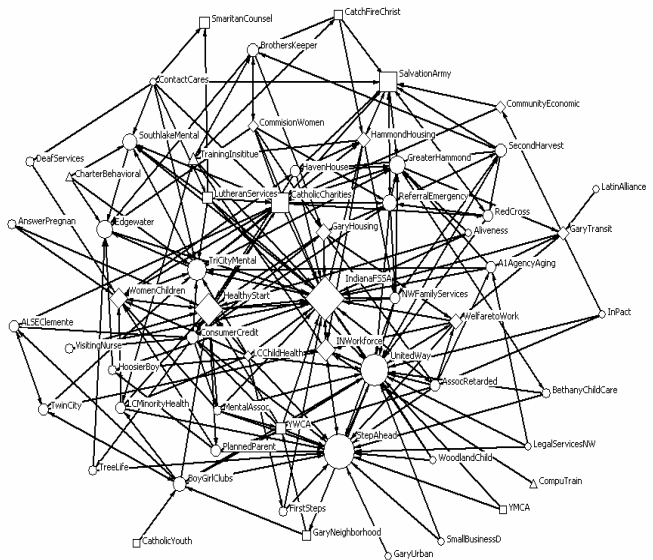
Lake County

Hierarchy of Social Service Agencies
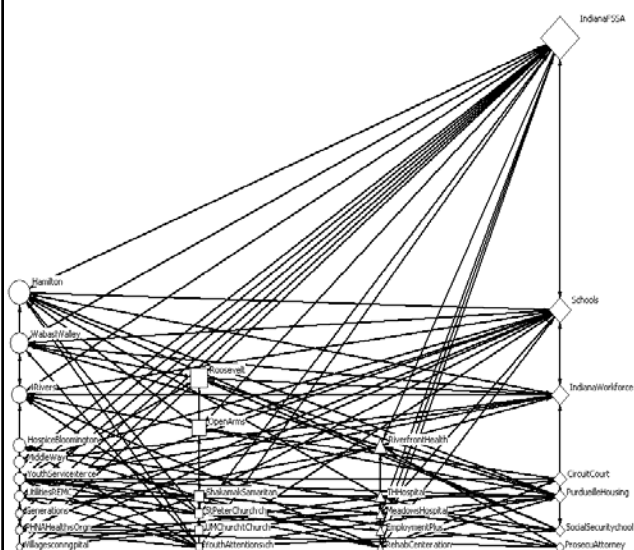
Greene County
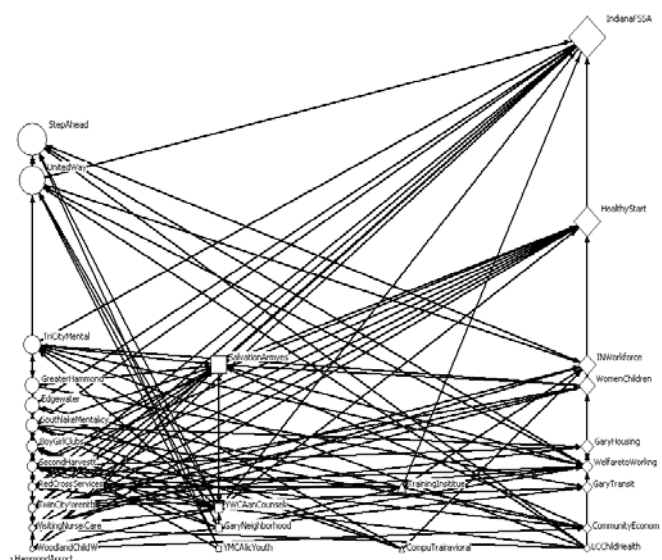
Lake County

Collaboration among Sectors
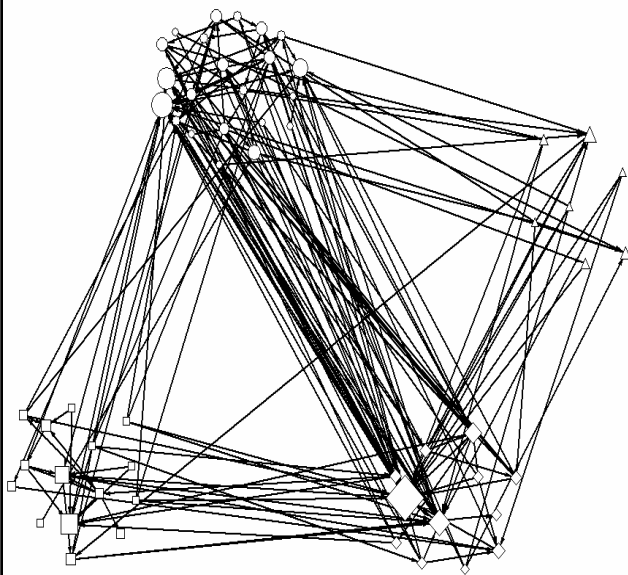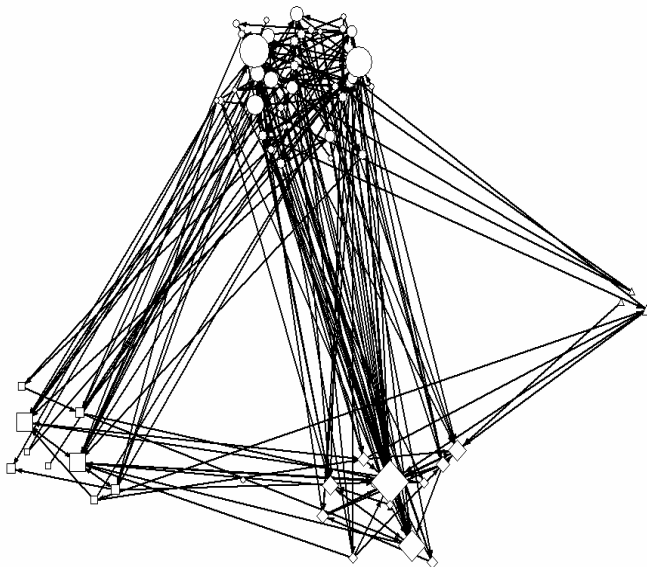
Greene County

Lake County

Change in Collaboration among Sectors
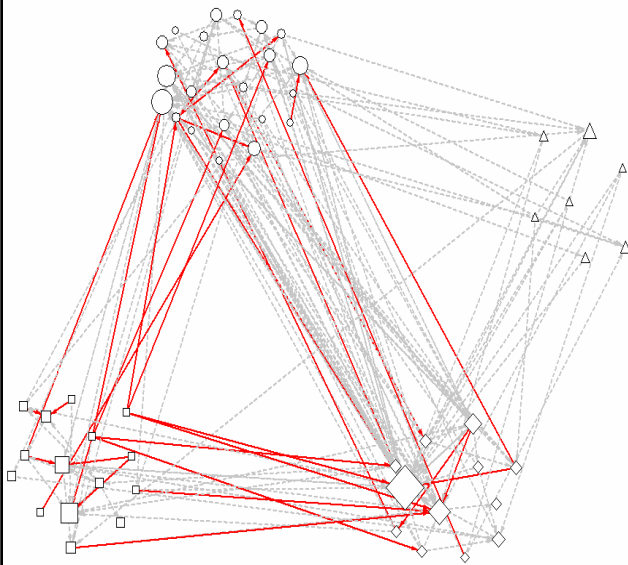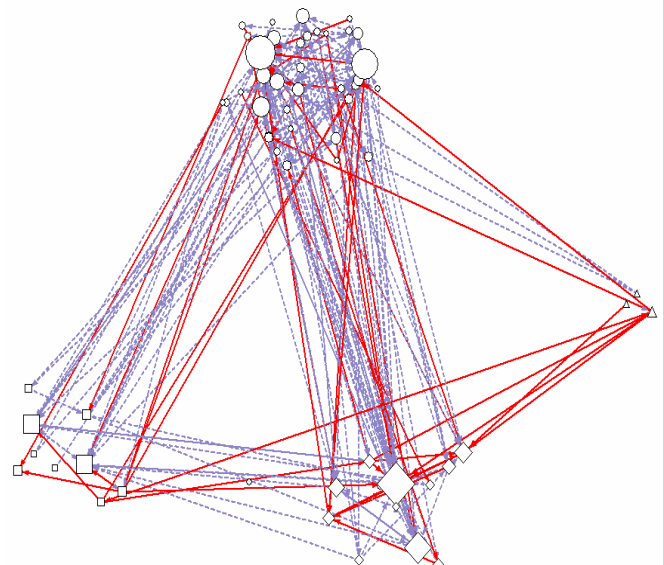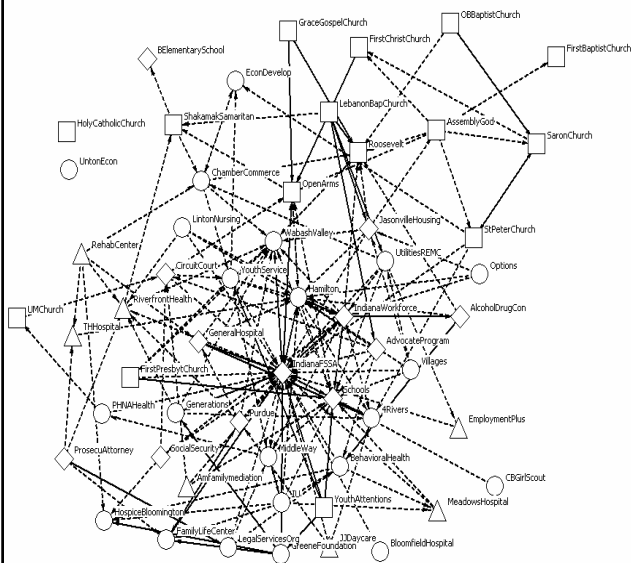

Greene County
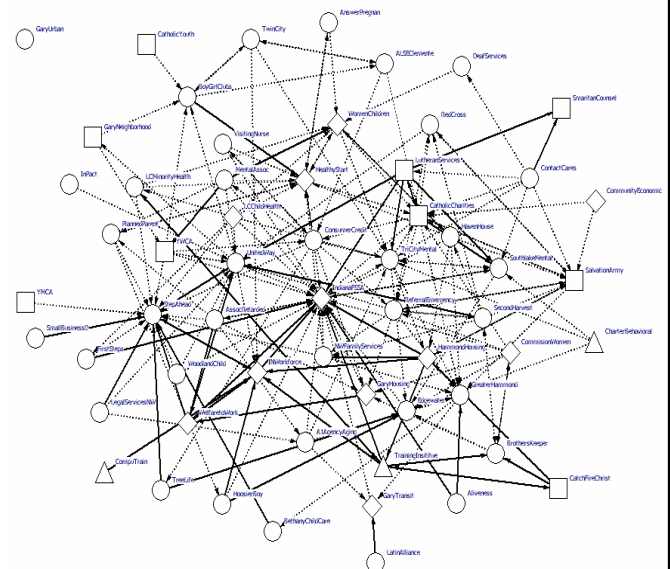
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Client Sharing Network
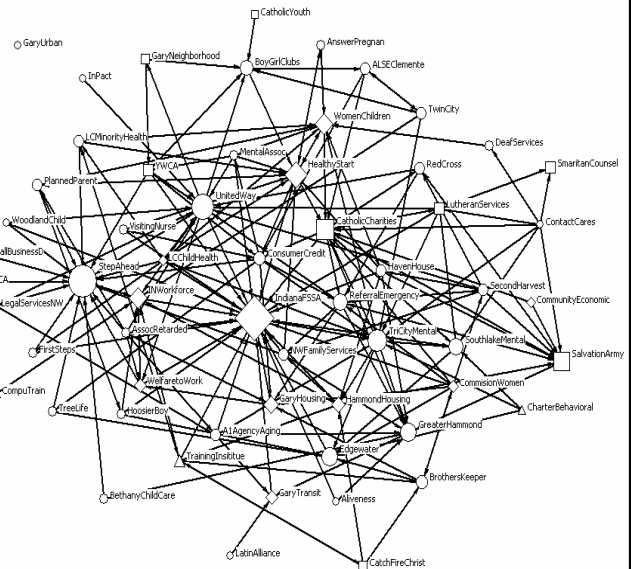
Greene County

Lake County

Funding Network
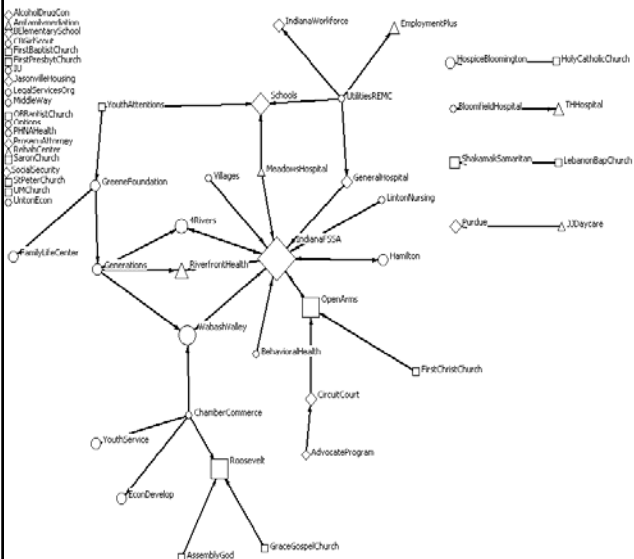
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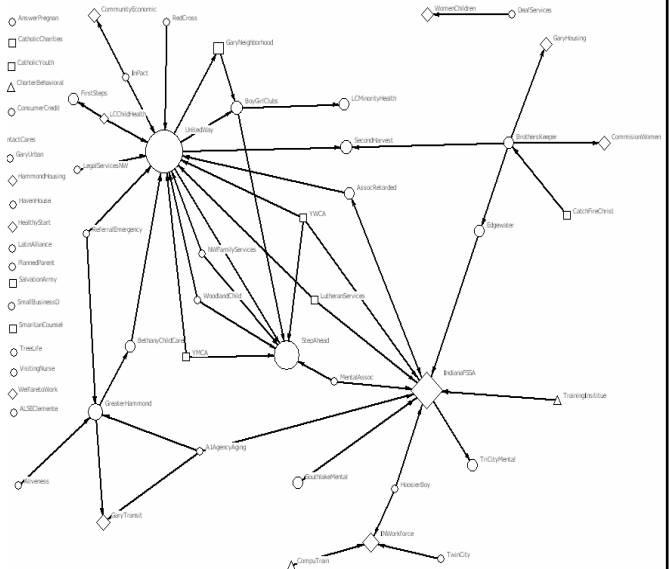
Lake County

Governance Network
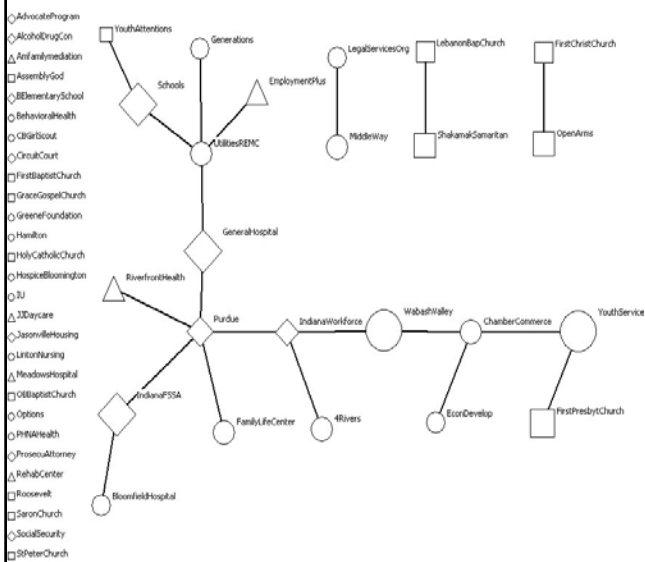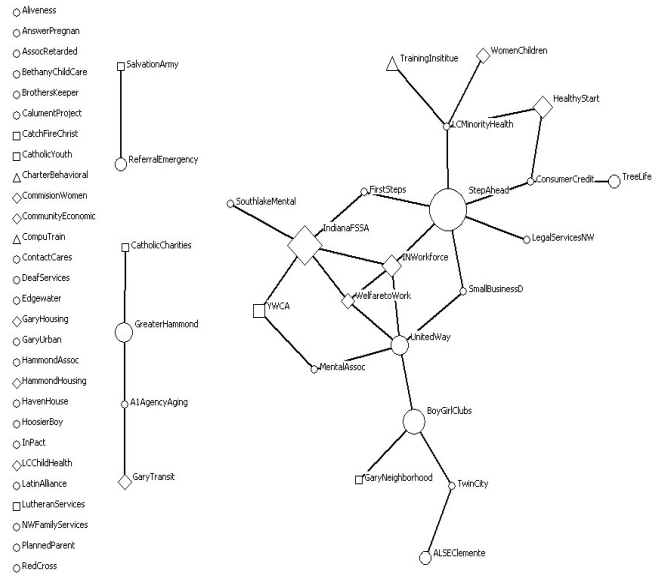
Greene County

Lake County

Co-Location Service Delivery Network

Greene County
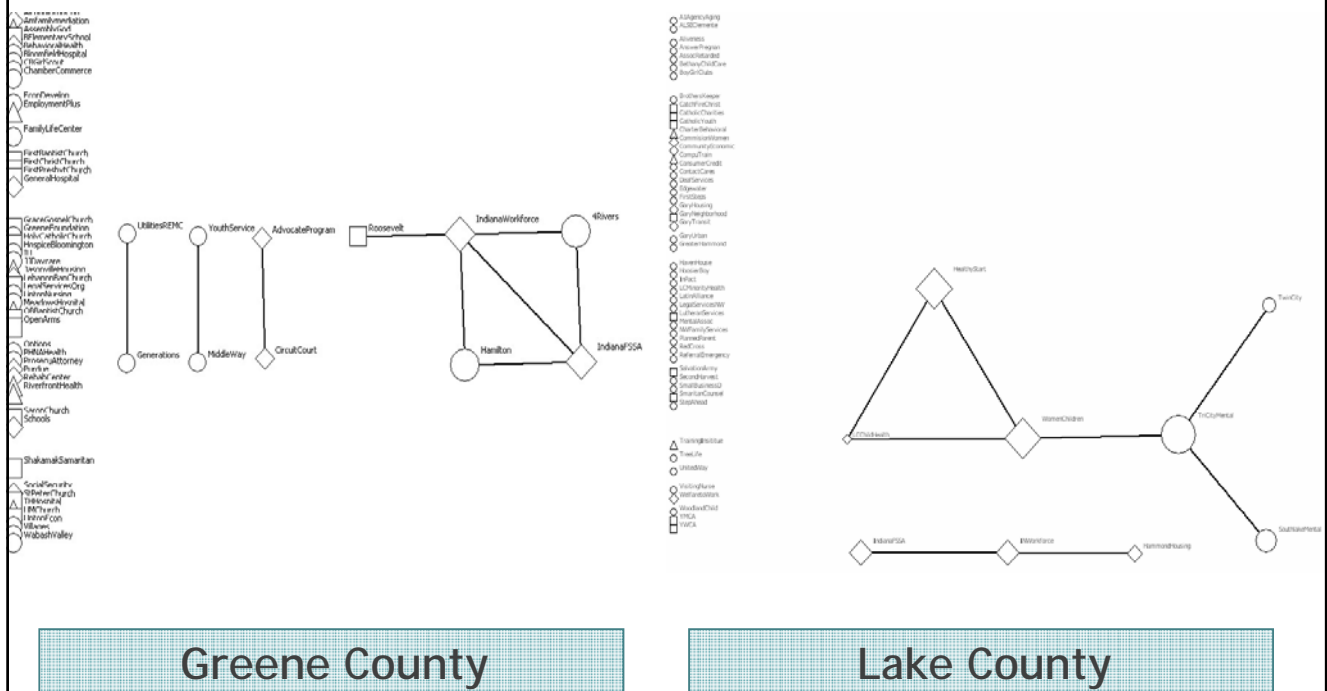
Lake County

Strength of Tie Network
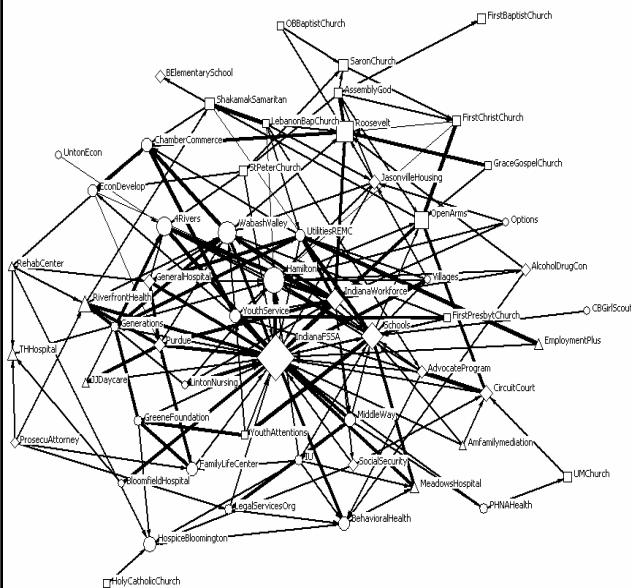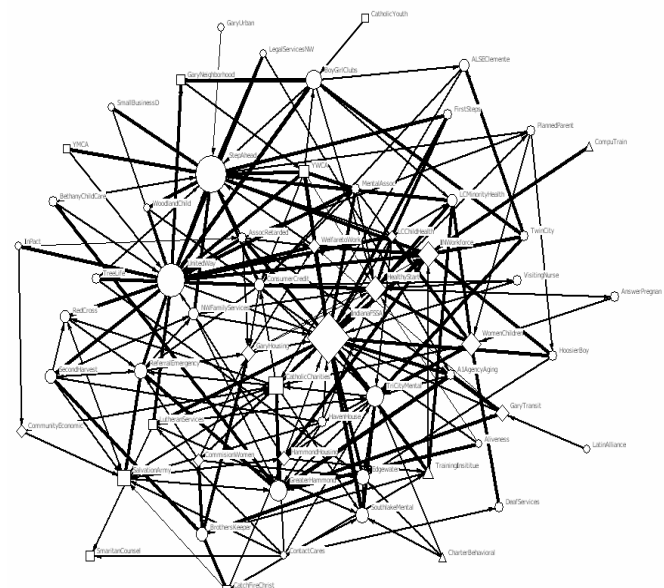
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Lake County

Cliques/Cluster with Strong Ties
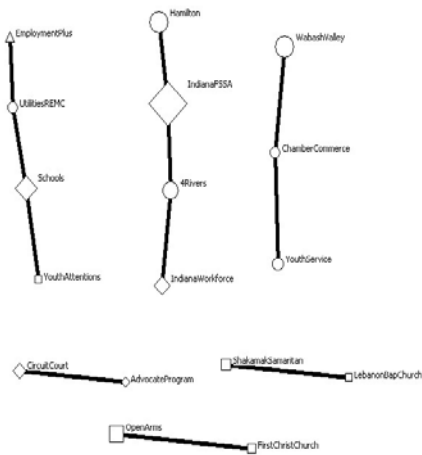
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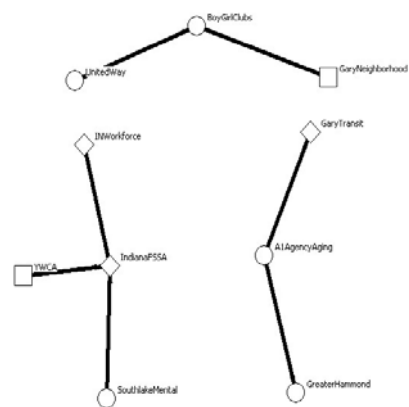
Lake County

Pre and Post Welfare Reform Differences in Network Structure

Network Change
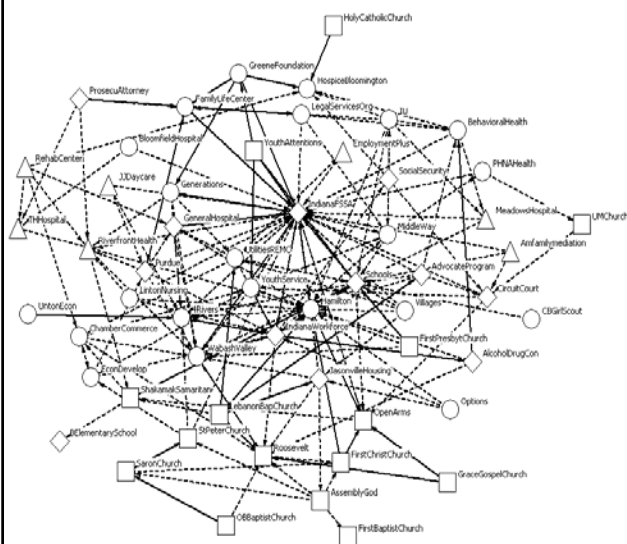
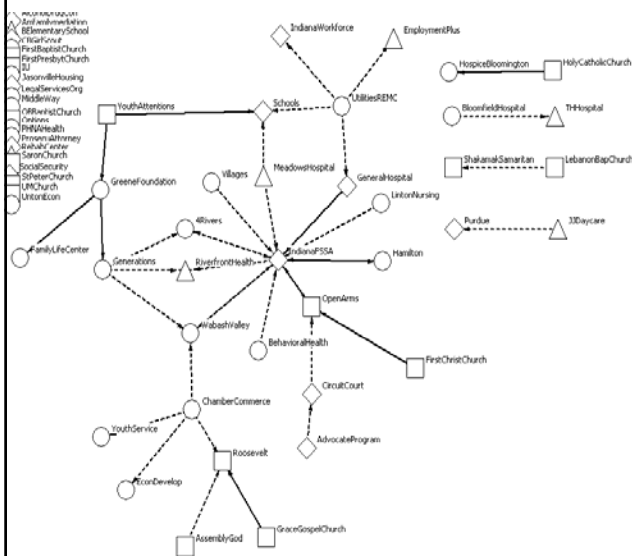Greene County
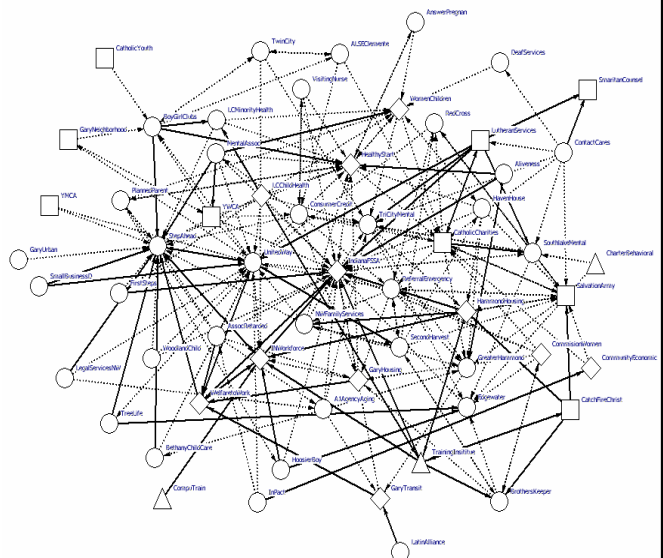
Lake County

Change in Client Sharing Network

Greene County
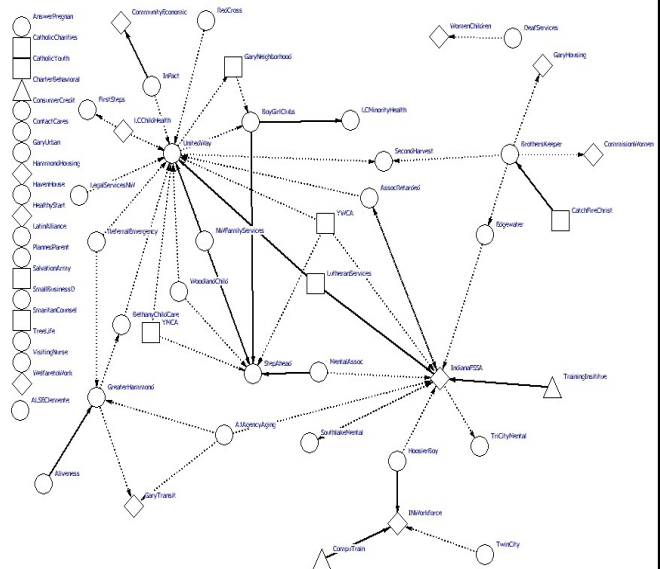
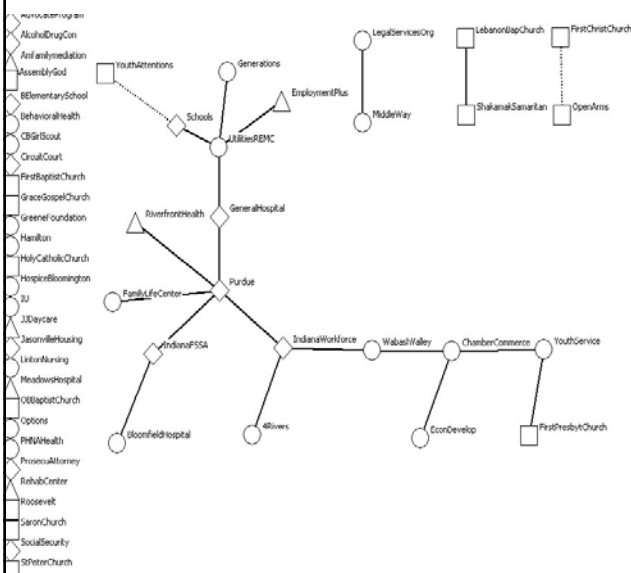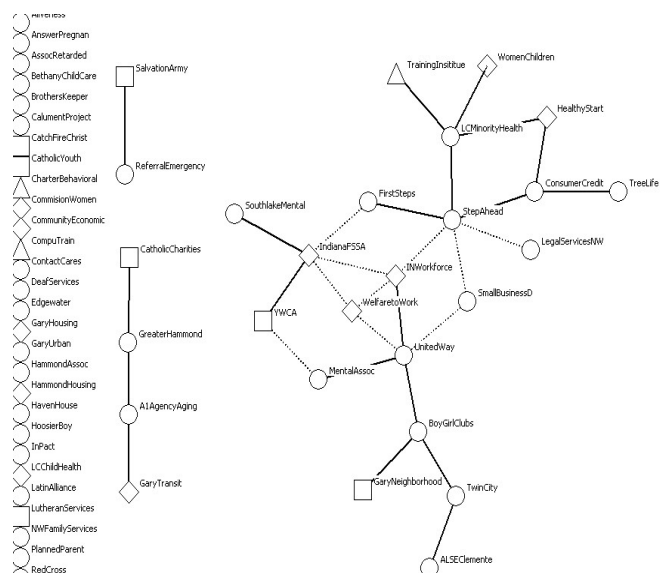Lake County

Change in Funding Network

Greene County
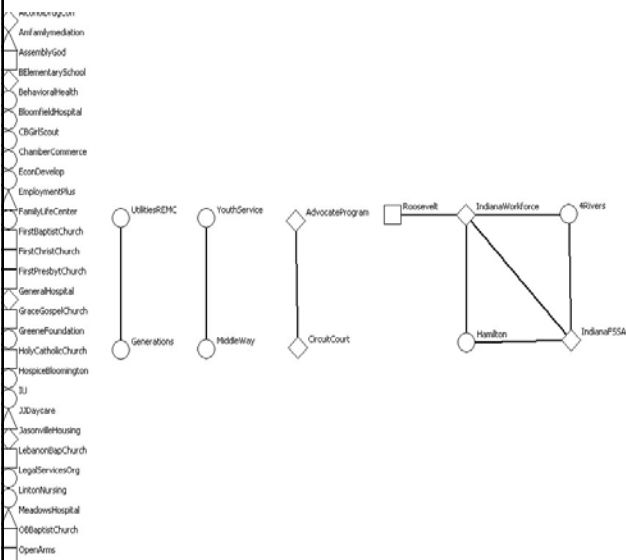
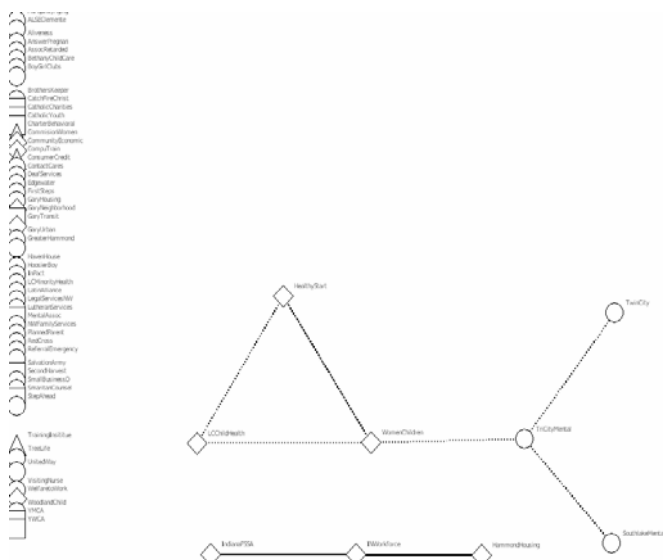Lake County

Change in Governance Network

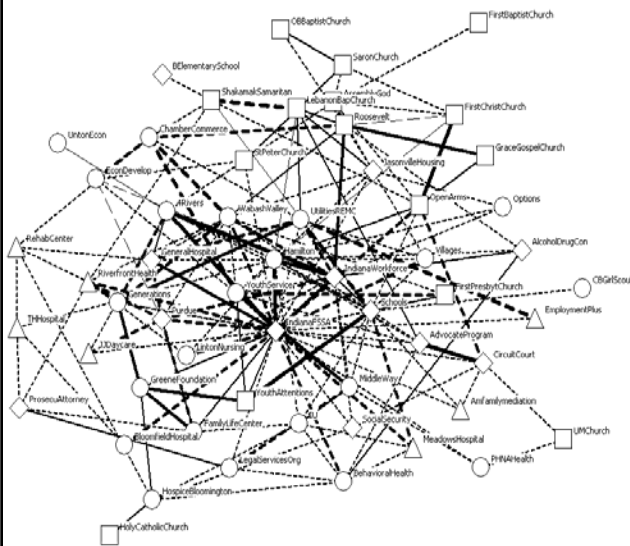Greene County

Lake County

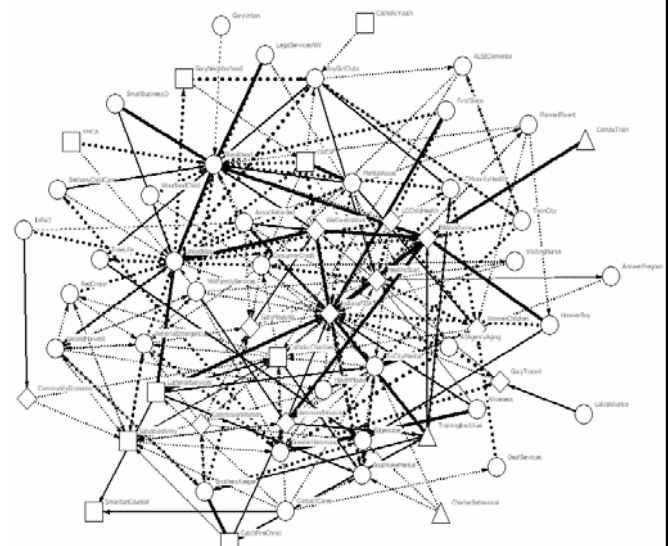# Change in Co-Location Network

Greene County

Lake County

Change in Strength of Tie Network

Greene County

Lake County

Change in Cliques/Cluster with Strong Strength of Ties

Greene County

Lake County

Propositions

Forming Propositions

- Based on previous theories and our previous analysis, this study suggests five important dimensions for developing potential network propositions for modern social safety net:
  - Frame
  - Structure
  - Power
  - Ties
  - Context.

Propositions

- Frame:
  - *The social safety net constructed by social service providers fully or partially overlaps with the social safety net constructed by clients. The level of overlap will determine the extent to which clients must go outside the network to meet their needs.*
  - *The social safety net structure that is constituted by the social safety actors shapes the behavior of clients seeking assistance and services.*

Propositions

- Structure:

  ▫ *The current social service interorganizational network is organized around a core periphery structure.*
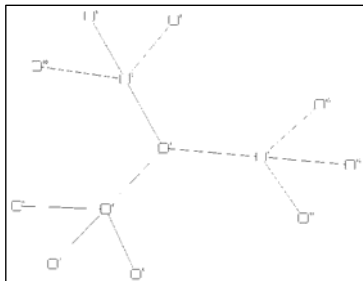
Figure 2A: Hierarchy Structure   Figure 2B: Integrated Structure   Figure 2C: Core-periphery Structure
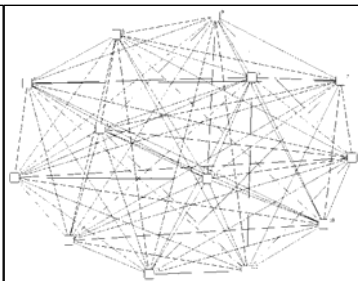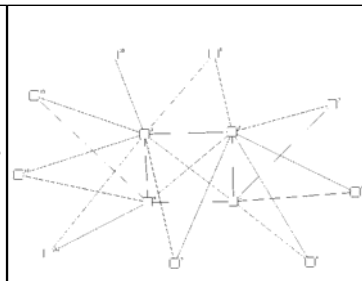
Propositions

- Power:
  - *Larger, more established, organizations providing a range of services will be core actors. Organizations that are smaller, less established, providing more specialized services will be peripheral actors.*
  - *Controlling for resources, age, past performance, and types of services, actors who play a brokering role or connect with other core actors are more likely to be core actors.*

Propositions

- Ties:
  - *The core actors in the social service provision are held together by strong ties.*
  - *Such network is constituted by weak ties between the core and periphery actors.*

Propositions

- Context:
  - *While this network serving more homogeneous clients and embedded in a political environment with a less competitive local economy, and a less dense population will have a more distinct core and periphery structure than a network serving less heterogeneous clients in a less partisan political environment, with a more competitive local economy, and a denser population.*

Discussions

- A diffuse and decentralized web of affiliation presents a dilemma for those that fund social services and others with an interest in managing and reforming the system.

  ▫ Many organizations do not form strong ties with the other network actors.

  ▫ It is difficult for any single actor or clique to establish authority and organize the provision of social service.

Discussions

- The social service system is organized mainly around client referrals and sharing relationships.
  - The shifts in public policy which alter the rules which govern the provision of public benefits to the poor, as well as other external economic or social events which may shift the demand and type of needs among the poor, will likely produce changes in the composition and structure of relations among anti-poverty actors.

Discussions

- New relationships formed to address new demand after the welfare reform.

  - New relationships include organizations designed to help promote employment opportunities for unskilled, low-wage workers were formed.

  - Also, new relationships include faith-based organizations that address emergency needs, such as help with housing, food and utilities are formed.

Discussions

- However, the diffuse and highly decentralized pattern of relationships among the actors creates challenges for individual's seeking assistance.

  ▫ It is difficult for individuals to navigate these complex inter-organizational environments where there is no single actor who can connect individuals to all other actors.

  ▫ They face substantial costs to search and eventually secure appropriate assistance.

Implications

- Three policy implications

  1. Shifting the level of analysis to network level allows policy makers to broaden the evaluation scope.

  2. Quantifying the interaction among actors reveals interdependency, which in turn redefines the power and influence of each actor within the network.

  3. We learn that the social service network could demonstrate a core-periphery structure. It calls for a new way of thinking about resource distribution and decision making channels of such unique structure.